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ABSTRACT

Changing ideas about the role of early education increasingly point toward universal preschool education for all children. Early education has come to serve many purposes but, as it expands, there is danger that the particular needs of young children will be overlooked by both professionals and parents. This essay underlines the vulnerability of young children and calls attention to the lifelong consequences of preschool experiences. Examining issues concerning the long term effects of preschool experiences, the discussion suggests that the value of early education will vary as a function of a matrix of factors including program quality, the vulnerability of individual children, and family needs. Additionally, the achievements and limitations of evaluation research are described within the context of possible deleterious effects of preschool education. Emphasis is given to the importance of developing ideographic methods of study to achieve more valid assessments of children's response to early education. It is suggested that more time be devoted to understanding the effects of substitute child care on parental attitudes and behavior and to delineating and documenting the damaging consequences of poorly run early childhood programs. (RH)

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Rethinking the Role of Research: New Issues and Lingering Doubts in an Era of Expanding Preschool Education

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Abstract

Changing ideas about the role of early education increasingly point toward universal preschool education for all children. This discussion examines issues concerning the long term effects of preschool experiences and suggests that the value of early education will vary as a function of a matrix of factors including program quality, the vulnerability of individual children, and family needs. The achievements and limitations of evaluation research are described within the context of possible deleterious effects of preschool education. Emphasis is given to the importance of developing ideographic methods of study to achieve more valid assessments of children's response to early education.

Rethinking the Role of Research: New Issues and Lingering Doubts in an Era of Expanding Preschool Education

As one deeply impressed with the influence of social and technological change on child development, I want to discuss the proposed downward extension of universal public schooling from the standpoint of the changing needs of children and their families, the changing role of early education, and the manner in which research both deliberately and inadvertently influences early education and thereby contributes to the flow of change that permeates the lives of children today.

My original plan, from which I will not deviate greatly, called for examining how research can inform us about the wisdom of expanding and extending early education. I viewed the field as being on the eve of a fateful decision with regard to instituting universal preschool education and, therefore, believed that this was a good occasion for taking stock of the role of research in so momentous a decision. It seems apparent, however, that the field is not so much at a dramatic point as it is in the middle of an era, well underway, of massive expansion. Thus, Gordon Ambach, Commissioner for Education in New York State, in a recent speech noted that he had originally been slated to be one of two debaters of the question, Public school for 4-year-olds, yes or no? but that it was not possible to find anyone to uphold the negative side of this issue (Ambach, 1985). Perhaps they did not look hard enough, but it seems clear that the drive in this direction is very strong and has great momentum--a momentum that needs to make us pause and think about its ramifications.

The Changing Pattern of Early Education

I begin by remembering that there was a time, not more than a few decades ago, when early childhood education, as I came to know it, viewed through the lens of psychodynamic theory of development, was seen as a vehicle of exquisitely delicate and sophisticated intervention in the psychic development of children. Those who worked with young children then were privy to the secret that the preschool years were a time of great formative influence and that it might be possible to strengthen the psychological fiber, so to speak, of "normal" children by arranging for them to have a variety of growth-supporting experiences in a milieu that included the type of nurturance, stimulation, and opportunity for exploration and self-expression that children needed. Early childhood education was one of the first arenas in which a very important idea was being played out--that normal psychological development could be fortified and enhanced by designing an optimal environment for children. Early childhood programs were dealing with the psyche, not just the mind of the child. They were viewed as adjuncts to the main crucible of child development--the family--to serve as a supplementary instrument for those families who were aware of the power of the new ideas of child development.

Were we, today, able to query members of that movement about the advisability of instituting universal public school programming for young children, they would probably ask questions that are still relevant but tend to be shunted aside by other factors, such questions as, What does it mean for a young child to have to live for part of the day with another adult and in another environment? How disruptive of the consolidation of early growth and development, and yet how broadening and strengthening, is

such an experience? How great are the strains and the stresses associated with having to adapt to the communication patterns, living arrangements, and behavioral frameworks of another adult under circumstances in which the response and responsiveness to the child are necessarily more diffuse and less tailored? What is the emotional impact for a young child of having to contend with and live alongside of a great many other children? What are the consequences, at different ages, of interrupting the sense of familiarity and predictability that is experienced at home, a comfort and stability that form the framework for later perceptions of and adaptations to new environments? If inappropriate or unfair demands are made of a child, at what age is he or she strong enough to withstand such assaults or to fight back, able enough to communicate such negative experiences to the parent? At what age is it good for children to have their explorations of the world guided, narrowly channelled, and even mandated? What are the gains and losses for a child exposed to a prescribed set of skills and facts that it is obligatory to learn? What does it mean to the young child to fail to live up to expectations, to be asked and be unable to perform certain tasks or learn certain concepts? What are the enduring consequences of having to adapt to an environment that may be perceived as unfriendly and/or to experience early failure?

These questions and the answers they evoked helped to shape the original rationale for early education, a rationale that recognized the extreme vulnerability of young children. They remind us of the fundamental importance of the child's need for stability, comfort, and regularity within a context of nurturance. They suggest that the need to cope with great stress at an early age may lead to lifelong conflicts and aversions.

Raising such issues seems out of place today, not because they are irrelevant, but because they are so utterly child-centered and because they appear to be based on the naive assumption that the home environment is totally benign, stable, and maximally supportive. Early education was once seen as supplementing and augmenting the rock-like foundation of family life. That picture has changed dramatically, partly because we view family life differently, partly because families and society have changed, and partly because early education now encompasses the full range of our child and parent populations.

Today, early education programs are sought for a variety of reasons, some of which are only indirectly related to the well-being of children. In their analysis of methods for studying the outcomes of day care, Travers, Beck, and Bissell (1982) point to the multiple constituencies of day care. Early education programs can be viewed as a service to children, one that equips them with school readiness and strengthens them socially and emotionally; or as a service to parents that frees them for work or other pursuits; or as a family support system that allows families to increase earnings while still meeting their childrearing responsibilities; or as a societal tool that increases employment and upward mobility; or as a vehicle for delivering such services as health care, nutrition, parent education, and family counseling. To this list of reasons for preschool education should be added the fact that, now that early childhood programs have come to be seen as valuable, universal preschool education under the auspices of the public schools would also serve to introduce equity in this field. As matters now stand, economically advantaged families are more likely to send their children to preschool programs, and these programs tend to be better staffed and

better equipped than those available to the families of the poor. Further, those in between--in the lower middle class--have little or no access to such programs.

These multiple constituencies represent major changes in the clientele of early education. The War on Poverty and the establishment of Project Head Start helped to extend the delivery of early education to the underprivileged. The heterogeneity of early childhood constituencies stems largely from this program and its offshoots. The implementation of Head Start also served to change the emphasis of early education. In Head Start, the educational program for children was sometimes deemed to be secondary to other program elements such as nutrition, parent participation, or social services. In addition, the focus of the educational program itself changed. Whereas in the past the educational goals of preschool were often expressly defined to be different from the academic objectives of the public schools, Project Head Start was more explicitly concerned with preparing children for the intellectual challenges and academic demands of elementary school.

It is apparent, however, that the multiple and changing constituencies today are not entirely the result of extending the clientele of early education to the economically disadvantaged. The privileged clientele of early education has also changed. For a variety of reasons, both pragmatic and ideological, women have now decided to take full-time jobs even if their children are very young. They are choosing to work because they need the money. Inflation and unemployment have made deep inroads in the purchasing power of families; families are finding that life is better when there is more money around, and one way to get it is to have women working.

Because of the greater incidence of divorce and mothers who have never married, there are also many more single-parent families. These women have to work. The women's movement has raised women's consciousness about the importance of career lines and the degree to which one's status and self-respect are associated with occupational achievement. Moreover, the high rate of divorce, when looked at realistically, suggests that the commitment to marriage has become less rigid. It behooves married women to maintain their skills and employability in the event that their marriages will end. Further, many women have come to believe that they are not good mothering figures or do not wish to play the role and plan to delegate the job of child care.

Apart from the changing needs and expectations of parents, there have also been important changes in the children themselves and in the structure of their families and home environments. These changes have affected their patterns of development and the nature of their developmental needs. Children are growing up in smaller families and have less access to extended families. As a result, they have fewer playmates and less opportunity during early childhood to play with other children. Early education programs have become a vehicle for providing greater access to friends and agemates. In addition, it is less safe in many areas for young children to engage in free outdoor, neighborhood play; they need more supervised and protected play areas, such as those offered by early education programs.

Although some people are sending their young children to preschool and day care because these options represent safe environments, others who might have chosen to spare their children the stress of too long or too early separations from home now no longer believe that it is possible in

our rapidly changing society to provide their children the kind of protective cocoon they once thought to be desirable. They have decided, instead, to have their children attend early education programs with the idea of exposing them to the challenges of the outer world under benign circumstances and providing them with the coping skills and worldliness to withstand the stresses from which it now no longer seems possible or useful to protect them.

At the same time, children themselves are changing. Many of us believe that their rate of development is being accelerated, albeit unevenly. Thorndike (personal communication, February 15, 1985) points to the data on the restandardization of the Stanford-Binet a decade ago as indicating that there have been substantial rises in the intellectual aptitude of young children. The developmental needs of young children and the role and design of early education need to be reassessed in the light of children's changing patterns of development. In weighing the prospect of earlier universal schooling, then, we need to consider a host of diverse issues.

These considerations emphasize that the issues at stake in judging the value of preschool programs have changed radically and are multifaceted. Because of this complexity, in order to properly gauge the potential strengths and weaknesses of universal preschool education, we would have to place each child in a cell of a multidimensional matrix whose axes define such key factors as parent needs and skills in childrearing; the child's needs, coping skills, and special areas of vulnerability; and possible alternative care arrangements that could be used if the projected programs were not available. Were we to conduct such an exercise with a random sample of children and families, we would

probably encounter a wide range of profiles--children for whom we might question the value of universal preschool education and others for whom it would be clearly recommended. I invoke the image of a matrix to emphasize the multiplicity of factors that influence decisions about early education and to indicate how judgments of its desirability will vary greatly from one child to another. What is abundantly clear is that issues about the vulnerability of children that raise questions about the suitability of early education or that call for particular constraints in program implementation are now outnumbered by increasing pressures for children to attend. Given the various benefits to be derived from preschool programs and the many needs to be served, the shadowy issue of children's vulnerability is brushed aside.

When examining the profile of each child in the matrix, the need to include in this equation the alternative child care arrangements available to each family points to a special problem associated with the study of the impact of preschool programs on children. In conducting such evaluation studies, it is not enough to call for appropriate control groups that provide data from equivalent samples reared at home. The groups being compared may be equivalent in all respects but the one that matters--the fact that many of the children in day care <u>have</u> to be there. In evaluating such programs, then, we need to ask not what would happen to these very same children if they were home like their control group counterparts, but what would happen to them if they were in some other form of group care, given the fact that their mothers will not be available during the day to take care of them.

Thus, overriding reality factors and the new uses found for early education make preschool programs a necessity for large numbers of

children. Once regarded as a vitamin supplement painstakingly designed to serve as an enhancer of psychic growth, whose dosage was carefully prescribed by experts for different clients in a restricted age range, early education has begun to serve other purposes and has become, so to speak, an over-the-counter medication, available without prescription. And now, in order to make it universally available, we are about to put it in the drinking water. The pendulum has swung from a concern for creating educational settings for young children in families explicitly committed to the goal of optimizing child development to the mission of extending the basics of group care to the larger population in a context of changing attitudes toward the role of women and parenting. Early education has shifted from being an enriching supplement to growing up at home to serving as an essential child care function for women who are unwilling or unable to assume exclusive responsibility for that role. What is best for the children remains an important issue--but is by no means the only one--in making decisions about early education.

This process of backing and filling, supported by changing societal priorities, in large measure describes the path of progress. There is, however, a disturbing element to the dynamics of current reform in early education. The increasing availability of alternative child care would appear to beget diminished commitment to enacting the parent role. As we persuade ourselves that alternative methods of caring for young children function equally well, we appear to set in motion a lessened commitment to parenting. And then we complete the loop in this downward spiral of child care by comparing the new child care programs with the diminished quality of home care that they have helped to bring about. In the course of being transformed from serving as a vehicle for <u>enhancing</u> family care to one

that substitutes for family care, early education has been not only an effect but also a cause of changing attitudes toward child care. It is in this context that I would like to discuss the current role of research.

But before I do, I want to examine some of the problems associated with offering universal preschool education. When I speak to knowledgeable and experienced early education specialists regarding the appropriateness of a year of universal education, their responses are almost of a single voice. They believe that today's 4-year-old is ready for a good preschool experience and that most 4-year-olds stand to benefit from such programs. But they emphasize that such programs need to be expertly conducted, must have a high adult-child ratio, and should create an intimate and comfortable environment. They want to see the programs located in settings that are small and appropriate for a young child rather than in large, overwhelming buildings that contain hordes of larger and older children. Above all, they stress the importance of having a competent staff, one that is trained in early education. It is possible that universal preschool education will be housed in public schools and will become organizationally connected to the elementary school program. Specialists express concern about the adverse impact of so large and impersonal a bureaucratic environment and about the possibility that excess high school teachers, unknowing in the ways of young children, will be reassigned to teach the very youngest children in the system in the same way that they have in the past been called upon to teach in kindergarten.

Among the first questions, then, that need to be settled are, If and when universal preschool education is launched, how can such a massive implementation maintain a scale of operation, both in its physical

environment and in the content and mode of teaching, that will retain the qualities needed to work effectively with young children? How will universal preschool education fare under the auspices of a bureaucratic organization that is concerned with education across the full span of childhood and in which special emphasis is placed on the later years of transition into adulthood? In some quarters, early education is seen as an integral part of the revamping of the educational careers of children so that they can leave earlier by starting sooner. In such a context, early education is not viewed as a distinctive, age-appropriate form of group activity that facilitates social development and cognitive exploration, but as the initial lap of a long academic course.

Among the issues raised by incorporating universal education into the public school system is what will happen when the current preoccupation with evaluation and accountability in the public schools is extended to early education. As matters now stand, evaluation studies of preschool are incidental and occasional; they do not represent an important intrusion and pressure on preschool education. What will be the effect of evaluation studies on preschool education if they are regularly conducted? Will achievement testing of preschool children be instituted and become a measure of competence of the teacher and determine salary levels? Will there inevitably be a teaching to the test that will slant preschool education toward a didactic and academic focus?

It seems essential for the protection of young children that the launching of universal preschool education be accompanied by a reorganization of public schools that will regroup classrooms for young children under a separate administrative unit and that this separateness be extended to their being housed in different and smaller buildings.

On the Role of Research

Turning to the matter of how research can guide us in weighing the pros and cons of universal preschool education, I will talk mainly about evaluation research. That there has been an extraordinary rise in the sheer numbers of people who are studying problems associated with early development and, correspondingly, in the amount of research activity is attested to by the number of volumes that are required to summarize child development research in successive editions of Carmichael's Handbook. More to the point, the current edition (Mussen, 1983) contains for the first time a lengthy chapter given over to the evaluation of early childhood programs. But this heightened activity gives little evidence of having hurdled the formidable methodological barriers to thorough and valid assessment of the impact of preschool experience.

The limits of evaluation research. In their comprehensive and scholarly review, Clarke-Stewart and Fein (1983) cite many of the unsolved methodological problems that impede valid assessment of the impact of early childhood programs: imprecise and incomplete descriptions of the educational environment whose impact is being studied; research design flaws stemming from nonrandom assignment of subjects; unavailability of suitable control groups and bias associated with attrition; and deficiencies in our ability to measure outcome variables comprehensively and with validity.

Flaws in design and the idiosyncracies of measuring preschool behavior produce biases in the data that are by now well-known. They include the following:

1. The virtual impossibility of achieving random assignment of subjects to experimental and control conditions, a circumstance that makes it difficult to determine the suitability of comparison groups.

2. The selective sampling of study sites, and indirectly of parents, such that the most effective preschool programs and caring families are chosen or make themselves available for study. This state of affairs imposes sharp limits on the generality of the findings.

3. Even in those rare situations in which solid equivalence between groups is initially achieved, the interpretation of results is bedeviled by selective patterns of attrition. In those few important opportunities to show the long term benefits of preschool education, as in the work of Lazar and Darlington (1982) and of the High/Scope Foundation (Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1984), there is a special burden on these investigators to demonstrate that the evidence for persistent gains is not simply attributable to selective factors of attrition that serve to reduce the experimental groups to children from the most caring and stable families.

4. Because the social context of psychological measurement in young children, including intellectual assessment, has such a decisive influence on outcomes, most efforts to measure the impact of preschool experience are biased in favor of those children attending preschool. The ease and comfort the child feels in being played with or interrogated by a strange adult (however the conditions of testing are best described) influences testing and, in turn, biases the outcomes of evaluation data in favor of children from group care. Such programs give children experience in interacting with strange adults, whether it be in processing language and communication patterns that are new and different or simply in feeling less uneasy and vulnerable in the presence of a stranger.

The problem of measurement is so pervasive that psychologists have grown to accept even the crudest methods of approximation as though they

were veridical indices, in the same manner as the comedian Buddy Hackett had come to believe that his lifelong case of heartburn was an intrinsic characteristic of how the body works and feels. In reading evaluation studies, we seldom encounter reference to the fragility of the measures, and when we do, they tend to be ignored by the very writer of those sentences. In the course of habituating to the intractability of the problem of measurement, we have somehow lost sight of the vast gap between the psychological phenomena we directly apprehend and that which is systematically recorded when we engage in measurement. A similar view of these limitations on measuring the outcomes of day care is expressed by Travers et al. (1982) in their chapter in the recent National Academy of Science report on evaluating early childhood programs. I quote from them at length to give emphasis to this major understated, and thereby unacknowledged, problem:

> Contrary to what one occasionally hears, there is no lack of candidate outcome measures for a wide variety of cognitive and social skills. However, as a reader of an early draft of this paper put it, there is good reason to question whether any of the candidates merit election. It is striking that a relatively small set of (intercorrelated) measures of general cognitive skills are used in study after study, while anarchy reigns in the measurement of social development and more differentiated cognitive skills.
>
> The attraction of standardized cognitive measures such as IQ appears to derive from their relatively high reliabilities (in the traditional psychometric sense) and their predictive validity against a criterion of success in school as well as from the historical influences of Head Start and its precursors. However, despite their widespread use, there is equally widespread dissatisfaction with those measures, even among many who use them. There are many reasons for dissatisfaction: Poor and minority children score less well on the tests than other children, leading to charges of cultural bias. The tests are generally designed to be insensitive to specific learning experiences, making them questionable as outcome measures for intervention programs of any kind. The most widely used tests do not attempt to measure creativity, persistence, flexibility, and resourcefulness in attacking problems or a host of other aspects of cognitive skill and style that may ultimately indicate much about a child's potential as a

> learner or future ability to use what is learned. Unfortunately, instruments designed to measure the latter aspects of cognitive development, though influential in basic research, have on the whole not demonstrated the reliabilities and predictive validities of the general ability measures, nor have they achieved public acceptance and widespread use in evaluation as measures of intellectual potential. There is a serious question in the psychometric literature as to how measurable these traits are and how separable from general intellectual ability.
>
> Similarly in the area of social skills, a bewildering variety of potential measures exists (see compendia by Johnson & Bommarito, 1971; Walker, 1973). Used primarily by highly trained researchers in academic settings, these measures have nevertheless not been impressive on psychometric grounds, especially when used by researchers other than their developers and especially when used in field settings. Although a few brave souls have stepped forward to suggest a definitive instrument battery for measuring "social competence" as an outcome of early childhood programs (Zigler & Trickett, 1978), no single instrument, let alone battery, has commanded widespread acceptance.
>
> It is not for lack of effort in the basic research community that measures of cognitive style and socioemotional development lag behind standardized tests of general cognitive and linguistic skill on psychometric grounds. When years of effort fail to produce a desired result, it is worth asking whether the enterprise is misconceived. (pp. 136-137)

The authors proceed to call for a strategy of measuring traits as a function of different contextual frameworks. I believe that the problem runs deeper and requires abandoning exclusive reliance on nomothetic approaches to measurement in favor of idiographic descriptions, a matter about which I will say more later.

Evaluation data in perspective. Despite these reservations and limitations, evaluation studies of preschool education have become more numerous. Such evaluations lack the authoritativeness that is frequently attributed to them, not necessarily by the researchers who conduct them and who usually are aware and acknowledge their limitations, but by the laypeople who read the reports. These studies do not deserve to be regarded as definitive; it would be more proper to regard them as part of the necessary process of groping that will someday enable us to study the

impact of programs comprehensively and with validity. We have such a strong hunger for evidence, are so much more ready to be swayed by evidence--no matter how flawed and deficient--than we are by rational argument--no matter how powerful--that research findings, despite their known limitations, are often used to support program planning and action: Witness the impact of the study of the long term effects of preschool by Lazar and Darlington (1982) and the extraordinary influence of the recently published findings by High/Scope (Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984).

The above considerations lead to the conclusion that our efforts to study the effects of preschool are limited in their informativeness. The data obtained from intellectual aptitude tests, which generate the main base of findings and seem by far to be the most reliable, are marred by the fact that they are so tangential to what is actually happening in the classroom and by the bias that is introduced by the differential responsiveness to the social context of testing of children from group care and the home.

If our measurement capacity were much finer than it now is, or is likely to be in the near future, and free from the problem of bias associated with the social context of testing, it is probable that we would find much evidence for sizable amounts of cognitive growth among children attending good preschool programs. The cognitive and also the social benefits of good preschool programs go largely unrecorded because of deficiencies of measurement. One of the reasons for the success of the influential studies of the long term effect of preschool (if, indeed, their findings survive close methodological scrutiny), is that they have

used more relevant and reliable dimensions of impact than standardized tests can provide.

There are also reasons to believe that, if more refined measuring instruments were available, some of the greatest gains would be found among children who are least often studied--those from culturally disadvantaged homes who receive an opportunity to attend a good preschool program. The results of an evaluation of New York State's experimental preschool program (Irvine, Flint, Hick, Horan, & Kukuk, 1982) indicate that the only cognitive gains that lasted beyond the period of preschool were those found among children whose mothers were lowest in the educational index. In a recent review of cognitive changes associated with day care, Belsky (1984) concluded that some of the most substantial cognitive gains have been those that arrest declines usually found in high-risk environments.

On the other hand, if we were able to assess the adverse impact of preschool education--probably the most elusive and complex of all phenomena in this field to measure because such assessments would entail long term, longitudinal case studies of children from the time they attended preschool--it is likely that we would find many substantial and serious negative effects.

The heuristic value of research. To my mind, the heuristic value of research is a more notable contribution to early education than the new facts that have thus far been unearthed. Even if their measurement falls short, the multitude of evaluation studies nevertheless begin to enumerate the main dimensions of the psychological influence of preschool. They contribute to the conceptual framework and, as they are operationally defined, to observational guidelines for thinking about and looking at

children in preschool. It is in the course of confronting the problem of gauging the impact of preschool and attempting to pinpoint the ways in which children are affected by this experience that the thoughtful evaluator begins to articulate the paths of preschool influence. The resulting mapping, though limited to those facets of behavior that seem to be measurable, nevertheless helps to clarify and order for the busy educator what the transactions of preschool are attempting to accomplish.

The value of preschool evaluation research to the child development researcher, as Clarke-Stewart and Fein (1983) have recently reminded us, is that they provide a mini-laboratory for studying the effects of circumscribed but enduring antecedent conditions on a variety of dependent variables. Indeed, the attempt to measure various outcomes of preschool education can best be described as an exercise in studying the construct validity of various dependent variable measures. Equally important, evaluation studies promote the adoption of a molar level of analysis, a level better suited to the development or elaboration of theory than the molecular levels to which researchers often retreat in search of precision.

Some unintended effects of research. At the same time that research offers heuristic stimulation, it may also lead to a deflation and deflection of the practitioner. The rising volume of research tends to dominate discourse and published writing about the development of young children. Not only is the level of analysis of most research too molecular to be useful to educators, its agenda are quite appropriately restricted to that which the research community has, for the moment, decided to study (and also to that which is measurable). The burgeoning literature on early development is increasingly filled with

research reports and is, therefore, heavily skewed in its focus in terms of the predilections and methodological constraints of research. By its sheer volume and systematic, empirical air, the research literature dominates writing about young children and thereby creates the misconception, usually unintended, that this vast literature deals with all that is known and needs to be known in thinking about children. As a result, it provides a misleading view of what is important. Not only does it point in the wrong direction, it may well deflect the early educator from doing her or his own thinking; in this manner, it may induce confusion and passivity in the practitioner.

Whereas, in the past, there was a partnership between early education and developmental psychology in the quest for understanding the young child, the vast expansion and differentiation of developmental psychology has assigned dominance to research and left early education in the role of consumer. Yet the level of analysis of most research and its quest for certainty and substantiation rather than theoretical elucidation and elaboration is more browbeating than useful to the educational practitioner. After intimidating and silencing the educator of young children by their masses of data and pose of authoritative mastery, psychologists rush in to fill the vacuum created by their dominance. This sometimes leads to the development of teacher-proof methods that further diminish the level of initiative and resourcefulness to be expected from teachers (see, for example, Becker, Engelmann, & Thomas, 1975).

One result of the dynamic of dominance of the world of research is to disarm early education and recast its perception of the growing child in the image of the conceptual framework of child development research--a reshaping that includes various gains to be sure, but that is more

abstract, molecular, and biased toward measurability; deals less with the whole child and the individual child; and seldom examines the developmental needs of young children. Part of the growing distance between teacher and child--the tendency for educators to become managers of the child group, to concern themselves with monitoring indices of progress, and to view themselves as cogs in an organization that processes children--would seem attributable to the influence of the abstract posture of research.

Some future research directions of high priority. In reviewing research needs associated with the study of the effects of preschool education, there are three areas or issues that would appear to warrant far greater emphasis than they now receive. Two of the three pertain to substantive areas of impact; the third refers to an issue of methodological reform.

With regard to this last issue, I have for some time been urging that we take more seriously the distinction made by Gordon Allport (1937) almost a half-century ago in one of the first scholarly dissertations on the nature of personality. Allport distinguished between nomothetic methods of study, wherein the same scales and dimensions are uniformly applied, and ideographic methods, which allow for the possibility that various dimensions will be differentially salient in describing the personality of different people. In brief, Allport audaciously suggested that we should sometimes use different categories and organizing frameworks to describe different people, that there are times when it is useful to abandon the basic principle of using uniform measuring rods in all our assessments. Complicated and limiting as the ideographic approach

is, our colossal problems of measurement are worsened by rigid adherence to nomothetic methods.

Especially in the study of young children, where there is less differentiation of psychological functioning and where particular and distinctive characteristics or themes of the child-as-a-whole tend to dominate behavior, it is fundamentally important to adopt an ideographic stance. Indeed, the ideographic approach epitomizes the mode of thinking about children in early childhood education. The teacher of young children is less concerned with abstract dimensions of broad influence than with the distinctive configuration of traits and issues that shape the agenda for each child in the class. As long as researchers cling to nomothetic methods and teachers of young children think ideographically, the tension between these different orientations will impede fruitful collaboration between child development research and early education and limit the potential contribution of research.

The two substantive areas of impact that merit much more work in relation to the questions of universal preschool education have already been noted. One pertains to the young child's vulnerability to experiences in preschool settings that may have enduring negative impact. With the exception of the widespread application of attachment assessments, procedures that are provocative but limited in their depth and scope and restricted to the study of very young children, there is insufficient attention given to the young child's sensitivity to psychological insult as it may occur in preschool programs--partly because this is an area that is exceedingly difficult to study and partly because we have come to value preschool as a solution to so many different

problems that we cannot afford to raise questions about how development may be adversely influenced by unsound preschool programming.

The emotional stress of preschool experience is not unlike the discomfort that most of us feel when we are asked to spend time in an alien setting, away from the comforts and supports to which we have grown accustomed (indeed, some people sacrifice the joys and gratification of travel to avoid such feelings), a stress that is compounded when we are asked to interact with others who know us less well or are less obligated or less disposed to treat us kindly. When such experiences turn out to be positive, they are gratifying and growth supporting. Young children learn that there are other persons and other ways of relating to them as well as other gratifications in store if they move out of their accustomed orbit of functioning. On the other hand, when such settings are not pleasant, they may lead to the hasty inference that the world out there is harsh and unfriendly and that it is our lot to put up with it. Not only may negative experiences foster a corrosive outlook, they may set off ways of protecting oneself, of shutting out such noxious stimuli and pulling in one's horns, that can have systematic and lasting impact on ways of interacting with the world.

We have come to believe that it is best for the young child to make excursions beyond the home fortress and to learn to adapt to such stresses, but there is the counter view that the young child is more open to the negative impact of such experiences and is more likely to recoil from them in decisive and irretrievable ways. The young child is vulnerable to more insults because he or she understands less and may therefore misunderstand more, is less able to arrive at a differentiated view of what is necessarily causing the discomfort and is therefore more

likely to make incorrect and sweeping inferences about their source. The younger child has fewer resources with which to evaluate a new experience, lacks the verbal and social resources to alter or contend with what she or he finds distressing, and is more likely to react in a whole way to a troubling situation. For these reasons, young children need more protection.

In effect, I am here again invoking the image of a vast matrix, within which children may be expected to respond differently depending on the quality of the preschool they encounter and a host of personal and familial characteristics. Added to this analysis is the spectre of negative impact that may be strong and lasting, though not immediately visible. These considerations seldom enter into the deliberations concerned with universal preschool. Possible negative impact is an ingredient that is also missing from most research approaches to the evaluation of preschool experience because we cannot directly observe and measure these emotional reactions and because their long term consequences are difficult if not impossible to assess with any kind of certainty and precision.

The other area that deserves greater emphasis and more detailed study is the effect of alternate forms of child care on both the commitment to parenting and the quality of parenting behavior. The comparative handful of studies thus far conducted are not very informative because they are based largely on self-selected samples (MacKinnon, Brody, & Stoneman, 1982; Stuckey, McGhee, & Bell, 1982). The question of whether there is a decline in parenting serves as a bridge between matters pertaining to the impact of preschool experience and the status of children today. Of special interest is a recent review of the effects of day care (Belsky,

1984) that includes a description of patterns of influence of day care bearing an astonishingly close resemblance to descriptions of today's school-age children obtained by the author (Zimiles, 1986) in a recent study of experienced teachers' and clinicians' retrospective views of how children are changing , how school-age children of today differ from their counterparts of a generation ago. The studies of the effects of day care indicate that children who have attended day care are more self-assertive (Moore, 1964), are more aggressive (physically and verbally) toward peers (Barton & Schwarz, 1981; Schwarz, Strickland, & Krolick, 1974), engage in more negative interactions with peers (Barton & Schwarz, 1981), have more negative interactions with teachers in first grade (Raph, Thomas, Chess, & Korn, 1964), and are rated as more troublesome by their teachers (Robertson, 1982). Preschoolers with extensive day care experience have also been found to be less cooperative with adults, more physically and verbally aggressive toward them, and somewhat less tolerant of frustration. In addition, it has also been suggested that they are more apathetic and less attentive (Schwarz et al., 1981), less conforming and less impressed with punishment (Moore, 1975), and more peer-oriented and less adult-oriented (Schwarz et al., 1974).

It should be noted that these descriptive statements are based on studies of children at different ages and that this essentially negative portrayal is largely based upon labels of scale points used to rate behavior that could be described more positively. The qualities of self-assertiveness and aggressiveness and the tendency to be less impressed with punishment and more troublesome could just as easily, and perhaps more appropriately, be interpreted as representing lessened docility and a greater degree of independence and freedom from intimidation than most

teachers like to encounter--attributes in children that might, nevertheless, be regarded as salutary.

On the other hand, the descriptions obtained by Zimiles (1986) closely resemble those offered by teachers in their discussions of how children are changing. School-age children are viewed by teachers as bolder, more open and self-assertive, and more worldly. At the same time, such children are viewed as more belligerent and defiant, more difficult to motivate, having a shorter attention span, and showing less impulse control. Teachers and clinicians report seeing children who seem to have embraced the peer group by default, who appear to be disillusioned with adults, and who show very little receptivity to learning and seem unconcerned with the prospect of failing. School has less meaning for children and has become a place where they "hang out." Clinicians see more children with feelings of emptiness, and educators see children who feel unrelated to adults, are unmoved by them, are less open to being inspired and more cynical, and have adopted a highly pragmatic outlook and an instrumental morality.

One is left with the impression of children living in a highly stimulating--really overstimulating--world, who feel abandoned and left to their own devices in an atmosphere of greater freedom, laxity, and emotional isolation. Although no educator attributed these behavior patterns to the heightened preschool experience of children, it would appear that the effects of preschool, insofar as they have been imperfectly measured in the studies discussed, do not counteract the above-described path of development--if in fact these broad generalizations about psychological patterns in today's children are accurate. These speculations and hypotheses about how children are changing are introduced in order to emphasize that the

issue of preschool education needs to be viewed in the context of the extraordinarily forceful dynamics of social and technological change that are transforming parents' ideas and emotional commitment to parenting and, thus, the nature of childhood.

Summation

This discussion of issues that surround the current interest in providing universal preschool education emphasizes the swirl of social change that has altered our ideas about the usefulness and the role of early education and has added a measure of instability and stress to the lives of children and their caretakers. Early education has come to serve many purposes but, as it expands, there is the danger that the special needs of young children will be overlooked by both professionals and parents. For this reason, this essay underlines the vulnerability of young children and calls attention to the lifelong consequences of deleterious preschool experiences. Nevertheless, it is clear that a great many children and their families have an urgent need for early education and stand to benefit from it. Key problems concern how to dispense such services on a mass scale in ways that will preserve the growth-supporting, intimate, and responsive character of such programs and how to minimize the distress and trauma to children when such programs are poorly enacted.

In addressing the agenda of research, it is suggested that more time be devoted to understanding the effects of substitute child care on parental attitudes and behavior and to delineating and documenting the damaging consequences of poorly run early education programs. At the same time, the validity and usefulness of evaluation research data are questioned because of deficiencies in their design and their capacity to

measure what matters. In order to call attention to the fact that universal early education must deal with a mass of children with distinctive configurations of development who require individual care and attention, the population to be served by universal preschool education is described as a matrix of individual children with diverse patterns of strengths, vulnerabilities, and family needs. These distinctive patterns, in turn, give emphasis to the need for adopting ideographic methods of study. Unless the rising volume of research becomes more responsive and relevant, it is likely that its impact on teachers of young children will be more stultifying than enlightening.

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